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AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE

REPORT ON AGRICULTURAL LABOR PROJECT

April 1957

Since the last report made in October 1956 the work has been proceeding along some of the lines indicated in plans for the future outlined at that time. The emphasis is not always anticipated beforehand, as work of this nature has to be opportunistic, and when "openings" occur, that is the time to follow through and explore that particular avenue.

Community Work

Teviston. Teviston, described fully in the October report, has continued to receive attention. On December 27 the Teviston Community Service District was formally organized after eleven months of effort and delay, and delay and effort. In choosing the slate of officers, for example, it was found that four out of the five candidates selected were not eligible because they were not registered voters. A new slate had to be selected. It developed at the election that only 32 persons could vote, out of 160 who should have qualified. However, the officers chosen were satisfactory. The Chairman is a young man who had not previously spoken much but had shown interest in all of the proceedings. James Morning is fairly young, has a steady job and is conscientious about his new office. At the first meeting the attorney had to tell him what to say each step of the way, but he has since asked Mr. McAllister for a manual on how to conduct meetings. He studies it during his lunch hour. It is interesting that he was not one of the original leaders but a faithful listener. He is quiet, steady, respected by his neighbors, anxious to learn, and developing as an unspectacular but sound leader.

The prospect of financing the water district was given a severe jolt by estimates handed in by two contractors consulted, one for \$69,000, the other for \$35,000. Even with the lower figure this was a staggering sum when the assessed valuation of the district was only \$32,000, the bonding capacity only \$6,400 and \$7,000 the most you could hope to raise from the community. Through Bob Vogel of the Pasadena AFSC office, a contact was made with the Kern County Land Company which offered to contribute the engineering survey for the well as a good will gesture. Even with this free service, financing the water system seemed pretty impossible. Just when spirits were lowest, it was learned that financial assistance might be secured through the Community Facilities Administration (part of the Federal Housing and Home Finance Agency). The Tulare County Health Department and the Planning Commission have cooperated with imaginative enthusiasm in drawing up the application for this federal assistance. The formal request has been submitted by the attorneys. Teviston settles now into an uneasy, anxious period of waiting.

Interest in a community credit union has been rather sporadic; it seems to rise and ebb with employment. There has been no enthusiasm for adult education in spite of the great need for basic English and vocational training. Efforts to register more voters before the next election are tied directly to the water project. A registrar has been promised "when Teviston has a water office."

Goshen. Goshen, which was mentioned briefly in the last report, has been a prime center for Bard McAllister's activity during the last few months and will be dealt with more fully in this report. Getting acquainted with people, sifting out potential leaders, trying to estimate the pulls for power and the "feel" of the ordinary resident has taken a lot of time. The ground work for a community meeting had to be laid by individual chats - at the store,

at the post office, on the front steps, even on the roof helping a man lay shingles. The purpose of the meeting was to organize a Goshen Improvement Council. About 30 were expected to attend but 200 showed up to hear Bert Muhly, the executive of the Tulare County Planning Commission, discuss the potentials of the community. Great concern was expressed for water development, street development, land use, building codes, and recreation.

The present analysis of this area shows 7% standard housing, 19% marginal housing, 74% substandard. The advent of several industries, one almost finished and one soon to move from Richmond, indicates that there will be an influx of population into the area. If a solution can be found for the healthier, less haphazard development of the community and at the same time keep costs down, the spread of at least one rural slum in Tulare County can be averted.

At the preliminary meeting of the Goshen Improvement Council, a committee of 22 was chosen as a planning group, and from these a committee of seven undertook the writing of a constitution and by-laws. In the meantime a large landholder, owner of some 2500 lots subdivided in 1888, who is selling on low, long-term payments, came to feel his taxes would go up if the community had decent streets, water, gas and other improvements. So he decided to attempt to sabotage the whole effort. He told his tenants that if zoning were adopted, a bulldozer would come in and push their houses off the lots. He employed a lawyer to write a constitution for the Improvement Council calculated to protect his interests; he persuaded the other committee members to sign and said that from here on there was no need for any elections since he, as first appointed to the committee, was automatically President. But luckily not all of the Steering Committee of 22 would agree to this and even the special committeemen were disillusioned when the would-be dictator demanded \$5.00 from each to pay the lawyer whom they had not engaged.

At the next Goshen Improvement Council meeting, a constitution was adopted - not the one drawn up by the large landowner. He was not present at the meeting (he is said to have a bad heart). His wife expostulated but she was overruled by the majority. Officers chosen at this meeting included both Negroes and whites.

A third meeting was called to discuss further steps. Unfortunately Bard McAllister had a conflicting engagement and could not be present. The would-be boss did not speak during the meeting, but worked through a man of very low mentality and no standing in the community, whose function was to disrupt proceedings. He interrupted the reading of the minutes and broke in at every point. The chairman was not skillful enough to handle him with the result that the meeting had to be adjourned without accomplishing any business.

So the following day the members of the community called Bard McAllister. "What do we do now?" The Executive Committee of the Council was called together to discuss strategy. Plans were made to hold a public meeting on zoning, with county officials present to explain zoning, its effects on Goshen, and the fact that no zoning activity can take place for at least eight months while a new county zoning ordinance is being developed. In the meantime the Council will continue to work on a water system, gas, street paving, etc.

In the community of Goshen, besides the landowner already mentioned, there is a well-to-do and somewhat cantankerous farmer. The chief opponent of the Council has solicited his support by telling him that if zoning went into effect and one of his cows died, he could not replace her or if his chickens had to be killed, he could not replace the flock. Interestingly enough, a member of the Agricultural Labor Project Advisory Committee, himself a larger farmer, knows this man and has considerable influence with him. Before the next community meeting he will reason with this farmer so that

he will understand what community development can mean to him and to his neighbors and he will understand that it will not infringe on his farming activities.

From the foregoing it will be readily understood that the process of community development for Goshen is likely to be a long drawn out, laborious enterprise and the education of the residents perhaps even more long drawn out than at Teviston. Each meeting is like a serial story and one waits eagerly for the next unpredictable installment. It is doubtful whether lacking Bard McAllister's help the Improvement Council could have been started and it would certainly have died after the second meeting.

Poplar. Continuing exploration failed to bring up anyone in this community sufficiently concerned and qualified to do anything about the young people. Bard McAllister finally met with the teenagers themselves - about 30 of them - at their cafe headquarters. Possibly a couple can be found to work as volunteers this summer to get a program going.

Home Industry

In a very small way several women and a boy are making toys in Allensworth. A crippled farm laborer in Teviston, for whom McAllister obtained tools, is turning out wooden articles. The experiment of marketing these objects at the Sequoia National Park will be tried this summer.

Other Community Activities

As Mr. McAllister becomes known in the county, he is increasingly called upon for help in a variety of causes. His committee feels that his efforts in regard to the annexation of Crowley, a westside substandard area, to the city of Visalia are invaluable.

A strange situation has arisen at the Tulare County Hospital where patients are refused treatment until they can produce a donor to the blood

bank. Some elderly inmates have even been denied visitors unless they can donate blood. The hardship of this policy falls especially on the low income people who don't have friends or relatives able or willing to donate. Many people are becoming greatly concerned and Mr. McAllister is helping to get together the influential people and citizens to look into this state of affairs and correct it.

An offer has come from the Migrant Ministry of the Council of Churches to put a couple and a single man under the direction of Bard McAllister and his committee because they would "like some of our people to observe the methods used by Friends" in work of this kind. The couple might well be used in Poplar and the young man in a variety of places.

Bard McAllister has spoken to the Ivanhoe Lion's Club, the Porterville A.A.U.W., Northern California Council of Churches Workshop on Legislation at Sacramento, Women's Groups of the Presbyterian and Christian Churches in Visalia, the Tulare Council for Social Action of the Methodist Church, and has appeared on a TV program of the Tulare County Coordinating Council of Health and Welfare. He also attended the meeting of the California Water and Power Users Association.

It is encouraging that the local committee working with Bard McAllister seems to be taking real part and seriously entering into almost all phases of the work. Detailed discussions have been under way towards planning an educational project for agricultural workers' children to be submitted for financing to the National Child Labor Committee. The prospectus for this should be ready in the near future.

One may say in conclusion that the work is spreading out in wider circles and that while the major emphasis has to be on local points, the influences are beginning to radiate throughout the county and more and more people are becoming involved in the evolution.